

January 2002



School Health Connections

School Health Connections is an interdepartmental program between the California Department of Health Services and the California Department of Education dedicated to improving the health and academic success of children and youth. This is accomplished through a coordinated school health system that combines health education, health promotion, disease prevention and access to health-related services in an integrated manner.

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Outreach in Action

CONNECTING KIDS TO HEALTH CARE

A SCHOOL DEDICATED TO GOOD HEALTH

There once was a little boy whose life revolved around a tooth. That tooth had a serious cavity, resulting in chronic absenteeism from his classroom at Lodi's Lawrence Elementary School located in San Joaquin County.

"I remember him so clearly," says school nurse and Healthy Start Co-coordinator Roberta Williams. "He spoke only Spanish so I was unable to talk to him in depth, but when I asked him if his tooth hurt, his big brown eyes spoke volumes to me. I didn't even need the 'si' to know how miserable he felt."

"To me, it's a no-brainer. If children are healthy, nourished, can see the blackboard and their teeth don't hurt, they can learn."

—Principal Cheryl Nilmeyer,
Lawrence Elementary

HELP ON THE WAY

Because the little boy's family was uninsured, help came from the Healthy Families Program. "We helped his mother apply and the boy was accepted into the program. The boy was immediately referred to a dentist and the problem was addressed," says Williams. She adds with a chuckle, "He's changed from being a chronic absentee to being a happy learner."

Principal Cheryl Nilmeyer shows no surprise at the resolution of this issue. "To me, it's a no-brainer. If children are healthy, nourished, can

see the blackboard and their teeth don't hurt, they can learn. But if a child has these problems, the child won't function academically. We aren't dealing with one part of a child. Our mission is to care for and nurture the whole child."

What is the role of a principal when it comes to addressing health insurance for children? According to Nilmeyer, "A principal is a leader. Dealing with the health of a child, including the critical need to make sure that a child has health insurance may be more than a

principal wants to do. It may also be more than one might want to have on her or his plate, but teachers and other school staff need to be empowered by site administrators to guide parents toward affordable health insurance programs for their children."

LAWRENCE ELEMENTARY: SCHOOL ON THE MOVE

Teacher Patty Kirsten is enthusiastic about how this philosophy is unfolding in Lawrence Elementary School. Kirsten is not currently teaching, working instead as a project facilitator. She interacts with Williams as Healthy Start co-coordinator.

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Principal Debra Nelson, Parkway School, Sacramento, is one of the many principals across California who support affordable health care coverage for children.

("A SCHOOL DEDICATED..." Continued from page 1)

Working in partnership with Lawrence Elementary School is the Community Medical Center, Inc. (CMC), a collaborative community facility directed by medical personnel, educators, park/recreation and housing personnel and many others in the community. CMC operates a satellite clinic, the Lawrence Family Center and Clinic, on the school site. The clinic serves numerous community members, many of whom are uninsured. "We are lucky in our school that we have so many resources. Our satellite clinic is able to reach a lot of people. We also see to it that parents are informed about affordable insurance alternatives, such as Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Families," says Kirsten.

"He's changed from being a chronic absentee to being a happy learner."

—Roberta Williams,
Healthy Start Coordinator

The Lawrence Family Center and Clinic is what Williams calls "one-stop shopping." Parents come to the campus, and they don't have to travel around the city for help with their children's health needs. This is especially important since many of our parents are walkers because they have no transportation. They can come to the clinic for health care services or they can just pick up an application for Healthy Families or Medi-Cal for Families and make an appointment to get free help filling out the application."

WHAT'S A TEACHER TO DO?

Teachers at the school are given help and instruction when it comes to understanding how to reach parents. Williams says they are urged to have information about health insurance programs available at parent/teacher conferences. "Not only should the parent be given written material, but they should also be verbally encouraged to fill out and submit the application and be assured that there is free help in filling out the application."



Williams feels there is actually an informal script teachers need to follow in speaking with a parent. She says they need to say to the parent: "Have you heard about the wonderful health insurance programs currently available to your child? We never plan on our kids getting sick, but when a more serious illness or health problem occurs, insurance allows a referral to specialists. Insurance is also there for routine check-ups and prevention."

Williams says she likes to encourage teachers to always end their discussions with parents with the thought that healthy children make better learners.

Both Kirsten and Williams think that is the message Principal Nilmeyer relays, and they appreciate the attitude the principal has toward health insurance. Williams points out that "our principal totally supports our outreach efforts and understands the critical need to get kids covered. As a result, school staff follows her lead. She's a great role model."



SCHOOL STAFF: TEAM FOR HEALTH

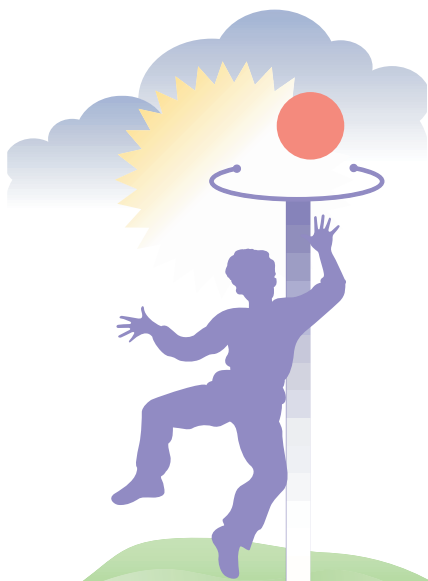
Principal Nilmeyer says "encouraging parents to have health insurance for their children is an important issue dealt with on a daily basis. It is ingrained in what we do in this school. If a child is not performing, what is not in place? Teachers in our school are encouraged to watch children carefully and be aware if a health problem crops up. Teachers know how to direct parents toward affordable health insurance. We have our school nurse, Roberta Williams, at all teacher meetings and health insurance is a part of what we talk about."

Nilmeyer's prior work was in a high-performing school where health issues were not a big concern. "Just about every child had health insurance. Then I came to this school, and it was a different world. I first of all made a concentrated effort to get a school nurse as we didn't have one at that time."

Looking back on the road she traveled to address health care issues, including health insurance, at Lawrence Elementary School, Nilmeyer does have some concrete advice to fellow school administrators. "You need to look at how your school is spending its money and prioritize money toward health care needs like health insurance outreach. Look at discretionary funds. Be proactive. Search out grants for health services appropriate for your school."

Lawrence Elementary School has come a long way in terms of addressing health care coverage needs for children. A little boy with big brown eyes and healthy teeth can testify to that.

The insert in this month's newsletter "**Promoting Affordable Health Insurance Through Schools**" is for distribution to schools. It can be copied and used for school activities and classroom use.



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MASTERS OF COLLABORATION: Pulling Together

The Grant Joint Union High School District is an unusual school district with interesting demographics.

Half of the district is in the city of Sacramento, while the other half is in Sacramento County. That makes the district half urban, half rural. The district has more than 12,000 students attending five high schools and six junior high schools.

"This district is unique in that we are one of very few joint high school districts in California. Our school serves young people in grades 7 through 12. We work with five feeder elementary districts that send us students. That means we need to be masters of collaboration and consistency," says Grant Joint Union High School District Director of Student Services Ray Carlile.

In addition, this district has great cultural diversity. "For example, when communicating with parents, the state of California mandates that all informational materials in our district be translated into seven languages," says Carlile.

"Everybody needs to be involved, not just those whose jobs are health-oriented. It should be a component of the instructional environment."

—District Superintendent
Larry Buchanan

A CHALLENGE TO BE MET

District Superintendent Larry Buchanan understands the critical need for every young person in his district under the age of 19 to have health care coverage. "It's a matter of priorities, both in principle and in operations. There is a clear connection between learning and good health. As we work to improve academic achievement, we cannot ignore the importance of health care coverage for our students. Everybody needs to be involved, not just those whose jobs are health-oriented. It should be a component of the instructional environment."



To that end, Buchanan believes that because teachers are with students every day, they are the front-line people who can identify students without health insurance. "It's important that teachers understand what information and guidance parents need to get their kids insured. Teachers need to be informed on available health care coverage programs and trained on how to promote these programs to uninsured families."

PARENTS, COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL BOARD

In the Grant Joint Union High School District, helping parents understand health insurance also involves addressing the

cultural and language needs of families in the school community. "We distribute a monthly community newsletter and in each issue we print information on affordable health insurance programs. Each month the insurance information is in a different language, with five languages rotating," says Buchanan.

Superintendent Buchanan has strong support from his district school board. Paul Green, Jr., is a school board trustee and a member of the California School Board Association's Children's Health Task Force. Green says awareness starts at the top.

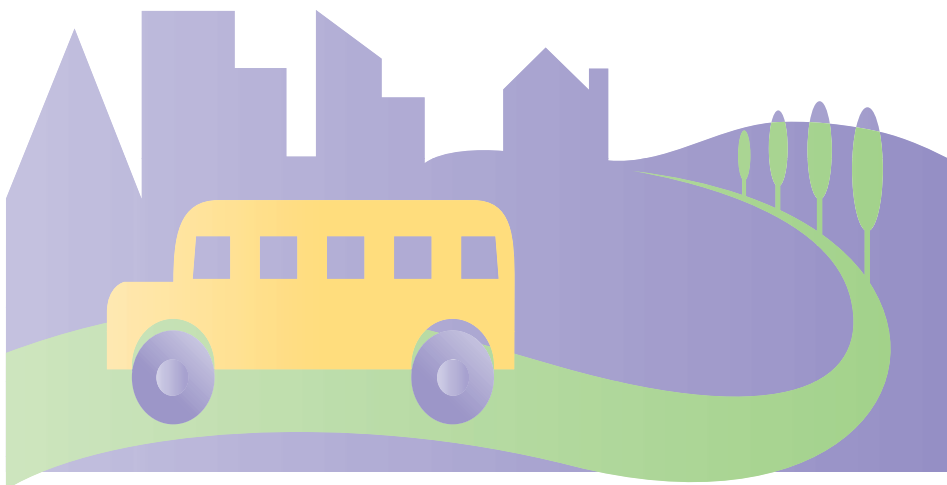
"The problem is not health insurance. It is the academic achievement of the child. Health insurance is related."

—School Board Member
Paul Green, Jr.

"The first step of leadership or management is to define the problem. The problem is not health insurance. It is the academic achievement of the child. Is health insurance related? I believe it is, and health insurance for our young people is very important to me."

Green is enthusiastic and excited about the Grant Joint Union High School District's myriad of children's health services, including offering Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Families.

(Continued on back)



THE PUSH TO COORDINATE

Superintendent Buchanan is a strong advocate for synchronization both at school and in the community. He feels that a goal of good management is to save the district's money by avoiding duplication of activities and services. He is looking at the health needs of young people in his district and ways the community can help.

"I met recently with five community-based organizations. Two were working on a similar project. They were located in the same building and didn't even know it. It points out the lack of coordination."

Buchanan's concept is to "build a ball field, and they will come. No one is stepping up to the plate right now to solve the problem of coordination. The whole idea is that the kids are required to be here and the community has the services, whether they are federal, state or community-based organizations. Why not bring the services here onto school sites?"

It is Buchanan's belief that services should deal with the whole family. Families should be the core of everything schools do.

Each school site in Grant now has people on board working to bring family and community members together. It is here that information is shared by everyone. A variety of health services for young people can be explained and offered. It is a rich environment to enroll young people in Healthy Families or Medi-Cal for Families coverage.

The vision in Grant Joint Union High School District is an extensive one. It involves district leadership, school board contributions, school staff involvement and community participation. Superintendent Buchanan's belief is that the isolated pockets of individuals can't get the job done. It takes a coordinated effort to make Grant Union students healthy and successful learners.

Check out School Health
Connections new Web site:
www.dhs.ca.gov/schoolhealth



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HEALTHY FAMILIES & MEDI-CAL FOR FAMILIES

Get complete medical, dental and vision coverage
for children up to age 19.

BENEFITS:

- Regular checkups (including well-child check-ups)
- Immunizations
- Prescription medicine
- Lab and x-rays
- Dental and eye care (including eyeglasses)
- Mental health and substance abuse services
- Physician and hospital services

ELIGIBILITY:

- Determined by family income, size and age of the child
- Covers children from birth up to age 19
- Available to U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals and qualified immigrant children regardless of date of entry (a child may qualify for some form of Medi-Cal, regardless of immigration status)



Short, easy mail-in application—
available in 11 languages!

HEALTHY FAMILIES

- No co-payment for preventive services such as immunizations.
- \$5 co-payment for non-preventive services such as illness.
- Monthly premiums from \$4 to \$9 per child per month to a maximum of \$27 per family.
- Choice of major medical, dental and vision health coverage plans.

MEDI-CAL FOR FAMILIES

- No-cost coverage.
- No monthly premiums.
- No co-payments for any benefit.

TOLL-FREE INFORMATION
1-888-747-1222

WORKING FAMILIES QUALIFY!

A family of four can make
more than \$45,000 a year.

Healthy Families	Medi-Cal
\$4 – \$9 per month per child All children in family, \$27 a month	\$0

You choose your doctor
and health plan!

You can get free help
completing the application.

Other options are available for children
who do not qualify for Healthy Families or
Medi-Cal for Families

Kaiser Permanente Care for Kids*
1-800-255-5053

California Kids* (for undocumented children)
1-800-374-4KID

*Not affiliated with or endorsed by the State of California.
Eligibility is based on family size and income.

www.dhs.ca.gov/schoolhealth
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PROMOTING AFFORDABLE HEALTH COVERAGE THROUGH SCHOOLS



WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO?



1. **Inform yourself!** Turn this sheet over for a quick overview of Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Families.
2. **Include information in materials you send home**, such as parent meetings and classroom activity notices. Copy the reverse side of this sheet to send home.
3. **Display or distribute written material** during parent/teacher conferences and open houses. Copy the reverse side of this sheet.
 - Talk with parents about the need and availability of affordable health coverage. Emphasize why it's important for a child's health and learning.
 - Let parents know they can call **1-888-747-1222** for an application and free help in filling out forms (help is available in 10 languages).

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?



1. **Offer school staff training and information** on affordable health coverage for families. Include in the orientation:
 - coaches
 - front office, janitorial and lunchroom staff
 - counselors and psychologists
 - bus drivers
 - school nurses
 - teachers and aides
2. **Ask your school food services director to include information** in the Free and Reduced Price Meal Applications and on lunch menus. Request For Information (RFI) flyers are available in 11 languages and free of charge by contacting School Health Connections.
3. **Print material in your school newsletter.** You can copy the reverse side of this flyer.
4. **Use school bulletin boards and the front office counter** to display information. Copy the reverse side of this flyer or call **1-888-237-6248** for display boards/pads and posters.
5. **Link up with a Healthy Start site**, community organizations and other health-related staff for more information or help.

For additional materials or to learn more about how to get involved, contact School Health Connections at 916/653-7746.

